

Nomination Synopsis
Robert Mitchell House
1749 Old Wilmington Road
Hockessin, DE 19707

The University of Delaware's Center for Historic Architecture and Design prepared this National Register nomination with funding provided by the National Park Service through an Historic Preservation Fund Grant Sub-grant awarded to New Castle County (a certified local government) as managed by the Delaware State Historic Preservation Office. On November 2, 2021 members of the New Castle County Historic Review Board approved this nomination. Members of the Delaware State Review Board for Historic Preservation will review this nomination at their public meeting on January 19, 2022 in order to offer a recommendation to the State Historic Preservation Officer regarding its potential eligibility for listing the National Register of Historic Places.

Level of Significance: **Local** – importance of a property to the history of its community, such as a town or county.

The Robert Mitchell House nomination summarizes research associated with the census-designated community of Hockessin as well as New Castle County, Delaware.

Period of Significance: Span of time in which a property attained the significance for which it meets the National Register criteria.

Though the original portion of the house was constructed during the 1850s and 1870s, it was expanded and altered over time. As a result of the University of Delaware's examination of extant historic fabric, their analysis determined that the property's period of significance (1958 – 1973) reflects characteristics associated with the post-World War II Early American movement.

Area of Significance: Aspects of historic development in which a property made contributions for which it meets the National Register criteria.

Authors of the Robert Mitchell House nomination identify "architecture" as the principal area of significance.

General Statement of Significance:

Criteria:

Criterion A: For a property associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

The supportive documentation presented by authors of the Robert Mitchell House nomination complementing Criteria A include the following conclusions:

The house possesses physical evidence denoting applications of a customized Early American style movement resulting in the creation of “a general Early American aesthetic by incorporating reclaimed building materials as well as new ‘historic’ features such as traditional fireplaces, exposed overhead joists and rafters, rustic brick floors, historic mouldings and trim, raised paneling on walls and doors, and reproduction hardware.”

Renovations undertaken by Robert Mitchell (carpenter and owner of the nominated property during the period of significance) represent personal design approaches “inspired by historical books... use of historical materials” as well as visits to restored historic properties and museums featuring period room vignettes such as nearby Winterthur Museum.

Criterion C – Architecture Distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose component may lack individual distinction.

Authors of the Robert Mitchell House nomination concluded that this historic property was not only the early 20th century residence of Robert Mitchell and his wife Patricia, but also functioned as an “experimental prototype and home workshop” thereby validating their interpretation of the property’s use as a “Laboratory for Early American Renovation” as well as a “strong and intact example of Early American renovations.”

Robert Mitchell’s reputation as an excellent craftsman contributed to his personal success and public recognition acknowledging him as an accomplished carpenter, designer, and general contractor especially among his well-to-do clientele. Mitchell’s business stationery promoted his carpenter-contractor capabilities with tag lines -- “Specializing in the Restoration of 18th and Early 19th

Century Homes” and “Additions, and Alteration work in Keeping With This Period.”

List of Character-defining Elements Associated with the Robert Mitchell House:

Denoted features represent Robert Mitchell’s adaptations of Early American style renovation practices creating an “illusion of old design in keeping with the 18th and 19th centuries while accommodating necessities for “modern comforts and sensibilities.”

Exterior

- Use of reclaimed or antique building parts (e.g., hardware, bricks, vertical plank wood – exterior siding and interior paneling featured in the breakfast room, workshop extension, and attic-level master bedroom).
- Mitchell’s Handmade reproductions and/or historically inspired features (e.g., operable raised-paneled shutters, hammered and hand-forged metal shutter dogs, Gothic Revival bargeboard trim with drop pendants – pattern used by Robert Mitchell still hangs in the workshop; Victorian style wooden brackets supporting pent roof, rebuilt the deteriorated front porch to resemble an authentic early 19th century porch).
- Application of Early American movement concepts (e.g., exposing joists, recreating joists to look historic, using large rustic bricks in flooring and for fireplaces, installing reclaimed lumber and antique hardware – doorknobs, lockboxes, thumb latches, adding a pent roof on the main façade between first and second stories).

Interior:

- Use of reclaimed or antique building parts (e.g., hardware, bricks, vertical boards on interior walls, beaded square balustrade and newel post on main staircase, classical mouldings and trim throughout the house).
- Robert Mitchell’s application of Early American movement concepts (e.g., Mitchell’s most signature touch – quasi-architectural “exposed joists” found in the ceilings in the Period I hall-and-parlor and in the rear bedroom located in the Period II addition, false whitewashed and roughly chamfered beams in the hall- and-parlor section of the Period I section, use of visible plug holes hiding the screws used to attach the beams to the real architectural joists hidden above the ceiling, creation/installation of faux joists, incorporation of brick for “Colonial” flair (another Mitchell touchstone) such as the rustic and pitted brick platform under the heating stove in the living room, pavement brick floors laid in running bond/herringbone patterns in the dining room and patio areas, design and constructed built-in cabinetry with raised panels and colonial style doors).
- Mitchell’s handmade reproductions and/or historically inspired features (e.g., kitchen custom-made vertical board cabinets).

Correlation with Delaware's Historic Preservation Plan 2018-2022
"Partners in Preservation: Planning for the Future"

Goal 1: Strengthen/Expand Delaware's Core Federal/State Historic Preservation Program.

Strategy 7: Address gaps and biases in the state's inventory of historic properties.

[The Robert Mitchell House National Register nomination represents a compilation of information about an intact example of an Early American renovation of a historic property owned, occupied, and renovated by an accomplished New Castle County carpenter, designer, and residential contractor during the 1950s through the 1970s.]

Action 7a: Prioritize cultural resource survey and National Register nominations to address different property types.

[The Robert Mitchell House National Register nomination identifies character-defining architectural features associated with an evolving house concept documenting the historic property's transformation from a rural 19th century vernacular dwelling into a renovated residence representing characteristic associated with post- World War II's Early American movement.]

Delaware State Historic Preservation Office
December 21, 2021

The Robert Mitchell House
Name of Property

New Castle County, DE
County and State

Periodization drawing showing the five periods of construction at the Robert Mitchell House.

